

# Fate of those over age 65



Dunya Sakit

January 4, 2021

## **Lessons of the pandemic: did we manage to organize home based services for people over age 65?**

Strict quarantine restrictions set since December 14 are still being continued. Over the past period, coronavirus contamination numbers have sharply decreased: daily numbers of the infected have dropped from 4 thousand to several hundred.

It is interesting that as compared to March-April period of last year, this time there were no restrictions for citizens over 65 to leave their houses: they were simply advised to stay away from crowded places. We can say that there was a similar situation in the whole world, as it is already clear that COVID-19 is not fatal for all of the elderly people...

Nevertheless, in order to protect the elderly people who are more vulnerable to this disease, most countries made certain efforts to prevent them from having a necessity of attending crowded places. For this reason, grocery and medical needs of people who live alone are met by state or municipality employees. For example, in the neighboring republic of Turkey, market-shopping and pharmacy needs of lonely citizens above age 65 and coronavirus patients who are going through home-based healing, are met by certain institutions. Both in European countries and in Turkey, there is a well-established social service network of state and local self-government bodies. However, we cannot state the same for Azerbaijan. Because activities, rights and powers of municipalities in our country are far from the classical scheme. Therefore, it is entirely up to the state to deal with

not only the elderly citizens, but also with all of the other groups of people in need of care.

In March - April 2020, citizens above age 65 in Azerbaijan, were not allowed to leave their homes. This decree was adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers on March 23. According to this decree, a special quarantine regime was set to start from 00:00 March 24, 2020, and last until 00:00 April 20, 2020. As a result of coronavirus threat in Azerbaijan, citizens over age 65 were not allowed to leave their homes during this period. It was also stated in this decree that people from this category who lived alone should be provided with social services in accordance with the law.

On April 4, the Cabinet of Ministers approved "Action Plan" on implementation of paragraph 10.2 of the act number 1950, of president of the Republic of Azerbaijan "on a number of measures to reduce the negative impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and consequently, sharp fluctuations in world energy and stock markets, on the economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, macroeconomic stability, employment and entrepreneurship", dated March 19, 2020.

One of the measures of this "Action Plan" in regard of strengthening social protection of population's vulnerable part is "providing home-based social services to lonely people above age 65 and providing services to those who are in need of a special care in service institutions". Implementation of this action was entrusted to MLSPP and its date was set to April – May, 2020. According to this document, this activity would cover 14 thousand people. Although it is not clear how this number was calculated, it is probably based on the number of people receiving home-based social services throughout the country.

Until 2011, social services to the elderly citizens (above age 70) were provided in accordance with the law on "Social services to the elderly people" adopted in 2001. Since the "Social services" law was adopted in 2011, law on "Social services to the elderly people" was no longer valid. According to the new law, one of the groups suitable for home-based services, is the group of elderly lonely people or couples above

age 70, who are not living with any able-bodied relative or legal representative and are in need of social services.

Home-based (mobile) social services consist of: assisting in obtaining medical supplies, necessary groceries and products of first-need; organization of recreation, assisting in ingestion and other household services; assisting in obtaining medical and psychological care; escorting to medical and education institutions; adaptation of living conditions to sanitary and hygiene standards; assistance in obtaining legal advices.

Home-based social services are organized in accordance with the “Home-based (mobile) social services providing rules”, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in January, 2013. According to these rules, elderly people who want to be provided with home-based social services, must apply in accordance with their registration address, in a written form to city and district departments (from now on – the department) of the State Social Protection Fund, functioning under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population. In addition, application for social services can be addressed by one of the adult family members, or parents in the interest of the person (or a family), other legal representatives (guardian, trustee), NGOs, as well as any other people if they have a permission from that person.

Home-based (mobile) social service is provided by social workers or social service people depending on its type. Services provided by a social worker are strictly qualified counseling-support services. On the other hand, social service people directly involve in physical assistance. It involves activities such as: assistance in preparing meals (as well as dietary meals); assisting in ingestion and dishwashing those who are unable to do it independently; assisting in bathing and hair combing; changing bed sheets; washing and ironing clothing and bedding sets; taking clothing and bedding sets to laundry and dry cleaning points (in case of their availability); minor clothing repairs; apartment cleaning; purchase of food and necessary industrial and household goods; organizing payments of housing and other utilities; contacting relevant organizations in order to cover needs for heating, fuel and repair; keeping the yard area organized; calling a doctor for

home visit; buying medicine from pharmacy with doctor's prescription; taking to a doctor for a check-up; and finally assisting in funeral processes in case of a death of the person undergoing social services.

It was announced that lonely adults wishing to receive home-based services should be applying to call center – 142. Head of the Public Relations department of MLSPF Fazil Talibov announced this via his social network account and it was published on numerous news reports' websites. Nevertheless, judging by the fact that elderly population of Azerbaijan, especially those who live in suburbs and villages have almost no interest in internet, we can make a conclusion that the level of information obtained through internet tools is quite low.

Well, there was indeed some information broadcasted on TV about organization of home-based services for people above age 65. Nevertheless, it is evident that wider informing methods should have been applied in order to make all of the people in need of this service aware of it. And in case of involvement, not only state agencies, but also civil society institutions and municipalities could have played an important role.

Effects of joint work between municipalities, civil society and state institutions can be easily seen in example of Turkey. Despite decision made simultaneously with our country, on setting restrictions for people above age 65 to leave their homes, Vefa Social Support Group was quickly founded in all provinces and districts of Turkey under the leadership of governors and 3 to 6 phone lines were already introduced by March 22. Those phone lines were widely advertised on all TV channels and other media sources in order to help the elderly citizens who had to stay at home, be informed and apply for any support they would need. Afterwards, Ministry of Internal Affairs reported on the number of applications on a weekly basis. According to this information, there had been 144.000 applications to support phone lines within the first week. 121.388 of those who applied received home-based services and the rest were related to obtaining general information.

Alongside with government agencies, municipalities took certain actions too and ensured delivery of ready meals to people over age 65. At the moment, municipalities provide these services to patients going through home-based treatment too.

As we can see in case of Turkey, home-based social services were provided also on the basis of citizens' applications. However, the process of informing citizens about this service was carried out in a much wider and better organized way, as compared to Azerbaijan. Due to lack of this kind of informing methods in our country, only a small number of citizens above age 65 managed to benefit from these services. From discussions that we had with a lot of citizens living alone, we can come to conclusion that they didn't even realize that they had to apply for assistance themselves and moreover, where exactly to apply. Some citizens even mentioned that they tried to apply to Heydar Aliyev Foundation for home-based services but couldn't even find necessary communication means.

According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, the number of people above 65 who received home-based assistance in Azerbaijan during restriction period is about 15 thousand. According to the State Statistics Committee, as of January 1, 2020, the number of people of age 65 and above was 719,9 thousand. 306,8 thousand of them were men and 413,1 women. According to this information, population of this age group prevailed in cities of Baku, Ganja, Sumgayit, Lenkeran, Sheki and districts of Absheron, Shemkir, Terter, Masalli, Tovuz, Jalilabad, Khachmaz, Guba and Barda. Share of those in this age group in total population, was bigger in the cities of Baku, Naftalan, Ganja, Nakhchivan and Sumgayit and districts of Terter, Gadabay, Gazakh, Gakh, Neftchala, Shahbuz, Ismayilli, Aghstafa, Goygol, Ordubad, Tovuz, Gusar and Zagatala as compared to the rest of the cities and districts.

Thus, it turns out that during the restriction to leave home, 2% of population above age 65 received home-based services. For a comparison we can mention that the number of people above age 65 in Turkey as of January 1, 2020 was higher than 7 million 750

thousand. Number of the phone call applications between March 22 and May 13 to Vefa Social Support Group which assisted citizens over age 65, was higher than 7 million 132 thousand. And the needs of 6.649.461 of them have been met. This equals 86% of the age group of 65 and above in the whole country.

We should also mention that, according to the decree on “Additional measures on the improvement of governance in the field of social protection” signed by president Ilham Aliyev on December 30, 2019, State Social Services Agency was founded under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population to provide social services in Azerbaijan. Charter of the Agency was approved by the president on June 30, 2020. The charter clearly states that one of the activities of the agency is to organize and carry out provision of social services to individuals (or families) in need of social services, in accordance with the forms and types established by the “Social services” law of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

According to the agency, it is working on the development of social services based on the best practices: “The target is to ensure that social services play a more effective and efficient role in lives of people obtaining these services. One of the goals of these reforms is to apply “social work” model in social services, based on progressive world practice”.

This model allows social workers to make precise decisions in problem solving by providing primary social services to those who are in need of them, as well as to ensure easy access to social services, restore their integration back into society, determine social and psychological needs and provide other services. In recent years, Austria’s experience has also been studied in the field of cooperation with its relevant agencies, within the Twinning project as a part of “social work” model implementation.